

POLAR BEAR RANGE STATES' MEETING

National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, U.S.A.
26-28 June 2007

Summary record of the fifth plenary session of the meeting

Morning of 28 June 2007

Chairman: Kenneth Stansell
Rapporteurs: Donna Brewer
Anne St. John

The Chairman announced that, the summary reports from the first and second plenary sessions had been vetted by the delegations and are being finalized, and the summary reports from the third and fourth plenary sessions were distributed this morning. He requested that delegates provide comments on the third and fourth sessions by noon today. He confirmed that all the country reports would be finalized today and, noting that the summary reports of the meeting would not be finalized today, asked if the delegates would agree to have him communicate the final meeting report as soon as it is available. There was no objection to this proposal.

Polar Bear Range States' Meeting Summary

Referring to the 6-27-07 Revised Draft of the Polar Bear Range States' Meeting Summary (6-27 Draft), the Chairman noted that the document is intended as a discussion document and incorporates consensus decisions reflected in the meeting notes. He suggested going through the document paragraph by paragraph to ensure that it accurately reflects the outcomes of this meeting, and the delegates agreed to this approach. The Chairman expressed his hope that the document could be finalized during today's sessions. After going through key portions of the 6-27 Draft pertaining to research and monitoring, he asked for initial reactions to the document. The delegates generally agreed to the direction of the document but requested additional time to review the 6-27 Draft before discussing it in more detail.

The United States announced that the amendment to the U.S. Department of the Interior appropriations bill, which would prohibit import in the United States of polar bear parts, was defeated in the House of Representatives yesterday. However, the Senate is still considering a similar proposal, but the United States reported that they anticipate a similar outcome. The United States also announced that the Secretary of the Interior would be participating in a press event this morning to announce the removal of the bald eagle from the U.S. Endangered Species list.

The Chairman suspended discussion for 45 minutes to allow delegates to more carefully review the 6-27 Draft.

Revisions to the 6-27 Draft are presented below using the text of the 6-27 Draft, with strikethrough for deletions and underlined text for additions. All revisions are attributed to the delegations, using the following ISO Country Codes: Canada (CA), Greenland (GL), Norway (NO), Russia (RU), and the United States (US). A summary of discussions and additional remarks are noted where appropriate.

Canada noted that the document used the terms “range States,” “competent authorities,” and “contracting Parties” nearly interchangeably and suggested that the language be standardized to “contracting Parties.” Greenland opposed this suggestion since Denmark was the contracting Party to the 1973 Agreement but Greenland was the competent authority in this context. They suggested using the term “competent authorities” throughout. Russia agreed with Canada’s recommendation and suggested that the meeting summary could make reference to Greenland’s unique status. The United States suggested using the term range States, and this suggestion was accepted.

The United States noted that the meeting dates are 26-28 June and not 25-29 June.

The second paragraph under **Impetus for the Meeting** was revised as follows:

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the 1973 Agreement would benefit from an assessment by the contracting Parties (CA) of its effectiveness in achieving its core objectives. The Parties used this meeting as a starting point for renewed efforts, and explored possible options and ways forward. They also noted that there had not been any meetings since 1981 on the 1973 Agreement.

The first paragraph under **Relationship of the 1973 Agreement to the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group** was revised as follows:

The World Conservation Union (IUCN), through its Species Survival Commission (SSC) Specialist Groups, provides a science-based network of ~~some 7000 volunteer~~ (NO) experts throughout the world to provide scientific advice to government agencies and others to support the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. Since 1968 one such group, the Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG), has provided technical support and scientific advice on polar bear conservation to the government agencies responsible for polar bear management in the Arctic Region. This group was formed prior to the 1973 Agreement.

Norway also suggested revising the last sentence to note that the PBSG was instrumental in developing the 1973 Agreement. Canada noted that the PBSG was established in 1968 and its first assignment was to assist in drafting the 1973 Agreement. They suggested that, owing to the relationship of PBSG to IUCN, the paragraph begin with the sentence referring to the formation of the PBSG and the IUCN role be included as a footnote. The United States expressed concern regarding Norway’s suggested revision since it might imply that the PBSG was a negotiating entity, and that was not the case. Norway noted that when the 1973 Agreement was negotiated, most of the PBSG members were government representatives; however, in the interest of reaching consensus on the language, they withdrew their suggestion. They agreed that the most important point here was to acknowledge the role of the PBSG today.

The second paragraph under **Relationship of the 1973 Agreement to the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group** was revised as follows:

The 1973 Agreement is a multilateral environmental agreement among polar bear range States to facilitate cooperative research and (US) management ~~implementation activities~~ (US) for polar bears among their competent authorities. While not formally mandated, it is recognized that the technical support and scientific advice on polar bear conservation provided by the PBSG to the range States supports the 1973 Agreement implementation and is a vital part of the decision making process that the competent authorities utilize in making their management decisions concerning polar bear conservation.

The first paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

This meeting provided a vehicle to share the current state of information concerning the status and threats to polar bear populations among the range States and outlined proposed management objectives and priorities of the competent authorities. The Parties agreed that impacts of climate change and the continued and increasing loss of sea ice -- the key habitat for both polar bears and their main prey species -- constitutes ~~the most~~ a (CA) significant threat to polar bear conservation.

Norway noted that they preferred the original language in this paragraph but did not want to block consensus by opposing Canada's change to this paragraph. Although the United States stated that they believed that sea ice retreat was the most significant issue facing polar bear conservation, they did not argue with Canada's suggested revision.

The second paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties identified opportunities for collaboration ~~and in the~~ (US) management of specific shared populations relative to status surveys, harvest quotas, and management plans. The Parties agreed to an enhanced coordination of management activities for shared populations ~~through the forum of the 1973 Agreement~~ (US).

The third paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties recognize the important contributions that the PBSG has made on behalf of the range States to the implementation of the 1973 Agreement. This expert group has reviewed and identified research and monitoring ~~priorities~~ needs (CA) that are critical to worldwide polar bear conservation, and this has provided important guidance for consideration by each of (CA) the range States.

The fourth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties agreed that they must work together to explore opportunities to address these ~~priorities~~ needs (CA) collaboratively and recognize that informed dialogue is required in order to explore the most effective and efficient means to address these ~~priorities~~ needs (CA). It is noted that several of the range States are actively collaborating on research in areas of shared populations and on specific research priorities including contaminants and climate warming impacts on polar bears and sea ice ~~and polar bears~~ (GL).

The fifth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties agreed that science and systematically collected (GL) traditional ecological knowledge on population ecology, demographics, and habitats are critical for the

informed management of sustainable polar bear populations. At present, and often for practical reasons, including for conservation purposes (CA), monitoring of the various subpopulations occurs at different frequencies and methodologies resulting in database (CA) incompatibility and incomplete spatial and temporal polar bear metrics across the vast Arctic ecosystem. The high cost of monitoring in Arctic ecosystems is most often the major impediment to obtaining the information that is required. These limitations need to be collectively (CA) overcome in the face of changing habitats in order to achieve conservation goals for polar bears in the face of climate warming, industrial development and other threats.

Greenland posed the question of how the identified limitations could be overcome. However, there was no additional discussion on this issue.

The sixth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties agreed that their most urgent research and monitoring priority in the near term is to ~~bring the monitoring programs into line with the management requirements and that one of the responsibilities of the Parties is to facilitate their implementation~~ secure appropriations and sufficient data on the status and trends of polar bear populations in order to secure sound management, not least where data are insufficient. It is the responsibility of the Parties to establish and maintain necessary programs to facilitate this (NO). The Parties further agreed that the meeting Chair, with the heads of the delegations of the competent authorities (GL), will facilitate a dialogue with the PBSG to develop a work assignment for the PBSG to define the minimum information needs and design standards, both conventional scientific monitoring and systematically collected user observations and traditional ecological knowledge should be considered (GL), for the ongoing monitoring and reporting of the status of each subpopulation and habitats. This design would be presented ~~for discussion at a proposed 2009 meeting of the Parties to the 1973 Agreement~~ by the PBSG to each of the Parties as soon as practicable (Chair).

Noting that the next meeting of the PBSG is scheduled for 2009, Canada asked if the group wanted to wait that long to get feedback from the PBSG. Norway, whose delegation includes a member of the PBSG, suggested that it might be useful to have the next range States' meeting back to back with the PBSG meeting. They suggested that the range States could meet immediately after the PBSG meeting, or conversely, the range States could ask the PBSG to reschedule their meeting for earlier than 2009. The United States noted that they are currently working on the budget for fiscal year 2009, and waiting until 2009 to meet again will mean that the United States will not be able to fund any activities until 2011. Norway added that the group is not asking the PBSG for a full assessment of the information needs and standards and the PBSG could probably complete its task before the scheduled 2009 meeting. Canada suggested that it might be possible to get feedback from the PBSG in 2008 via teleconference or other electronic media.

There was no change to the seventh paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes**.

The eighth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties clarified the status of sport hunting within the context of Articles III and IV of the 1973 Agreement. The Parties noted that currently Canada allows sport hunting as a part of their subsistence harvest. Greenland is considering sport hunting within its polar

bear management framework. Norway, Russia and the United States do not allow sport hunting and do not anticipate allowing sport hunting in the foreseeable future. The Parties agreed that, where they are available (RU), properly managed sport hunting programs do not pose a ~~significant~~ (CA) threat to polar bear conservation and may provide an incentive for polar bear conservation.

The ninth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties noted the ~~inherent rights~~ tradition (US) of indigenous peoples for subsistence harvest, acknowledged the inherent right in Canada of indigenous peoples for subsistence harvest (CA), and the need to ensure that subsistence harvest, particularly of shared populations, must be based on sustainable management programs. The Parties agreed that continued coordination among range States as part of a scientifically based framework for shared population management is critical.

The tenth paragraph under **Meeting Outcomes** was revised as follows:

The Parties agreed to a number of action items relative to the issue of bear-human interactions. For oil and gas development, the Parties agreed that this is an emerging issue and that there is a need for active and integrated management to minimize impacts on polar bears and their habitats, and for (NO) monitoring programs and a greater understanding of the impacts on polar bear populations. For village safety issues, the Parties agreed that there are increasing incidences of polar bear-human interactions, and there are a number of positive examples of programs to reduce this conflict. The Parties agreed to an exchange of information on best practices to minimize conflicts.

In response to a question from Russia, Norway clarified that the management to which they refer in their suggested change to this paragraph is management of oil and gas explorations. They believe that the oil and gas industry should be required to take into consideration polar bear conservation in their activities.

At this point, the Chairman closed the session.